



Agriculture Farmland Preservation Testimony for Legislative Program Review and Investigation on  
Behalf of the Connecticut Department of Program

Submitted By: Kip Kolesinskas, Consulting Conservation Scientist  
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Dear Co-Chairs Fonfara and Rowe, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Program. I am Kip Kolesinskas, Consulting Conservation Scientist for American Farmland Trust (AFT). Prior to working for American Farmland Trust, I served for many years as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Soil Scientist for Connecticut. One of my responsibilities was to administer the Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, which since 1996 has provided over \$ 20 million in matching funds to purchase agricultural conservation easements on farmland in partnership with the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. This federal investment, which would not have been possible had it not been for the state program, has helped to protect over 80 farms and 8,000 acres.

As the Federal Program Manager in CT, I worked very closely with the state Farmland Preservation Program. I saw firsthand how the state program operated, from its ranking criteria to the reviews of easement language by the State Attorney General's Office. I found the Connecticut Program to have withstood the test of time and to have adapted and grown, with a process of review and decision making that meets or exceeded the Federal program requirements.

As a Soil Scientist, I also understand the importance of protecting the state's most productive soils. The better the soil, the more adaptable it is to the future needs of agriculture and the more resilient to the impacts of climate change. The federal program has very specific criteria for soil eligibility, as well as limitations on the amount of impervious surfaces. Again, the State's program consistently brought forward high quality projects that met or exceeded these soil-related requirements. Overall, during my tenure as the federal partner to one of the most respected State programs in the country, I felt that dedicated staff were using a well designed and implemented State Program to work with CT landowners and farmers to effectively and efficiently protect the best farmland for current and future generations.

My personal observations are in keeping with what American Farmland Trust has found through its surveys and evaluations of state Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement—or PACE—programs around the country.

Founded in 1980, AFT was an early advocate for Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program, and we continue to work closely with the CT Department of Agriculture and through the Working Lands Alliance to ensure that the program remains effective, efficient, and adaptable to the changing needs of agriculture. Toward this end, AFT has been involved in two studies of the program.

The first, done in 1988, asked Connecticut and Massachusetts farmers who had participated in the state program to provide feedback about the effect the decision has made on their farms and communities.

The majority responded positively:

- 79% said that the program has had a positive effect on agriculture in their area
- 91% said that the program makes it possible to keep land in agricultural production.....

The second, completed in 2006, which surveyed only Connecticut farmland owners who protected their farm through the state program, found a couple of key changes to the farm, including:

- 43% said they had now invested in their farm buildings, equipment, and increased production
- 25% said they had branched out into new crops, livestock, or created new farm products
- 73% said they now planned to convey the farm to a family member

These findings are consistent with a national survey just completed of farmers and farmland owners who have protected their land through state and local PACE programs. Survey findings—which are still being tabulated and which we will pass along to the Committee when finished-- show the effectiveness of these programs in maintaining working lands that stay on local tax rolls, encourage business reinvestment and expansion, and protect land in perpetuity for future generations. A couple of the most compelling initial findings:

- 96% of respondents said their land is still in active agricultural production
- 81% reinvested the proceeds from the sale of their development rights into their farm operations, and
- 83% have implemented conservation practices that improve the environment.

With adequate funding, staffing, and support we expect that the Connecticut Program will continue to be one of the most successful in the country. The Farmland Preservation Program is a critical tool to protect land from being lost to development, to keep farmland affordable, enable the transfer of land between generations, protect the environment, and build local economies through agriculturally based economic development. The Program continues to offer an effective and efficient way for Connecticut to not only benefit current residents, but to provide an investment that fulfills our responsibility to future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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